

Acknowledgment

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A Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus* from Ernakulam district

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On 3 November 2013, I waited for my usual feathered visitors in my balcony at Ernakulam on Sunday morning. Other than the very common ones nobody seemed interested. The sun too was shying away under the blanket of clouds, no chance of a good photo too, so i gave up. My wife came from the work area rather excited around 7AM, saying there was a Shikra-like bird on the terrace. I took a few photographs of the bird before the crows chased it away. While viewing it on my laptop, it turned out to be something new. After consulting the field guides, I zeroed in on Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus*, but was not certain. There seem to be very few reported sightings from Kerala (Sashikumar *et al.* 2011). So I referred the photo to others including Jinesh PS, Praveen J and Dipu Karuthedathu. Praveen & Dipu gave a pictorial comparison and confirmed it as a Lesser Cuckoo. I was elated to hear that there are only two prior photographs made of this species from Kerala. There is one photograph from Thekkady by Clement Francis which he published in Sanctuary Asia (Francis 2002, Sashikumar *et al.* 2011) and another one from Nelliampathies which is accepted in OBI, http://orientalbirdimages.org/search.php?Bird_ID=443&Bird_Image_ID=2345&p=19 Other two records from Kerala are sight records.

Some of the characteristics which helps in narrowing down the species are...

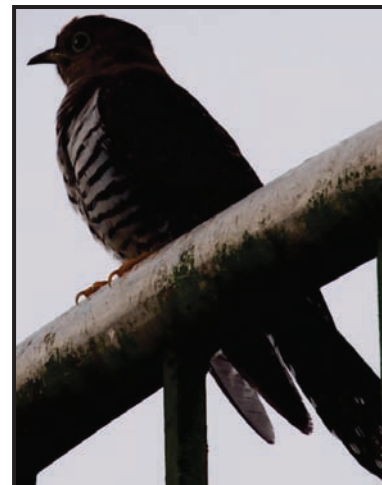
- 1) Compared to Indian Cuckoo *C. micropterus*
 - a. Indian Cuckoo does not have a hepatic morph
 - b. The tail seems to be too uniformly barred black and white.
 - c. The prominent barrings in vent (vs almost pale vent with very light barring) is also another pointer towards Lesser.

- 2) Compared to Eurasian Cuckoo *C. canorus*
 - a. More compact (vs elongated)
 - b. The barrings on the breast is broad and bold (vs fine in Common)
 - c. The crown and nape looks uniform (vs barred).
 - d. Darker eye (vs yellow eye)

I would like to thank Dipu Karuthedathu for explaining the identification features.

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Checklist of the birds of Ondayangady Reserve Forest, an isolated forest patch of Wayanad, Kerala.

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Introduction

The Western Ghats mountain chain is recognised as one of the 'hottest hot spots' of biological diversity, out of 34 Biodiversity hotspots in the world and is well known for its high endemism and rarity. The Western Ghats have historically been heavily altered due to human impacts on natural landscapes through urbanisation, agriculture, plantations, hydro-electric projects, roads and deforestation (Nair, 1991, Myers *et al.*, 2000). The knowledge of the species composition and diversity of avifauna is essential in the development of management and conservation strategies (Davi & Smith, 1998).

The Western Ghats has nearly 508 bird species of which 3.5% are endemic (Rajmohana & Radhakrishnan 2008). Birds are in the apex of the food chain and act as ecological indicators. The seasonal variation in relative abundance of bird species might be related to the availability of resources and also to the breeding season (Karr and Roth, 1971). Wayanad district (Wayanad sub plateau) is located in the eastern slope of Western Ghats and South West of the Deccan plateau. It is refuge to many endemic and endangered fauna and flora.

Study area

Ondayangadi Reserve Forest (N 11°49' 47" E 076°2' 46") is a narrow patch of forest located in Begur Range of North Wayanad Forest Division. This forest patch is five kilometres away from Mananthavady town and has an elevation of about 830 m above mean sea level. It is mostly isolated and covers an approximate area of 3 km²; the surrounding areas being agricultural land and homesteads. This patch has a narrow connection to Ambathinalu, Palvelicham forests and consequently it is connected to the Tholpetty Range of Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary in the north. This narrow connection is bisected by the Mananthavady - Mysore road. The forest type is tropical semi evergreen and Teak plantation.

The two perennial streams that originate and flow through the forest are the main source of water during the summer. The South West and the North East monsoons brings about rain in this region, but higher amount of precipitation is experienced during the former. This patch supports a diverse group of mammals such as Spotted Deer, Wild Boar, Malabar Giant Squirrel, Barking Deer, Bonnet Macaque, Slender Loris, Hanuman Langur, Leopard, Leopard Cat, Jungle Cat, Porcupine, Black-naped Hare, Palm Civet etc.